

Intel ranks No. 1 Fortune 500 firm for commuters

Beaverton-based Nike joins the largest private employer in Oregon in giving workers incentives not to drive alone

By Lisa Grace Lednicer
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Oregon's largest private employer is the top company in the nation for commuters, according to federal officials.

Intel, which is based in Santa Clara, Calif., but employs more people in Oregon than anywhere else it operates, offers its workers subsidized Tri-Met passes, extensive vanpool service and emergency rides home. An internal company database matches prospective carpool partners and suggests provocative questions to stave off awkward morning silences. And it has a "road rage page" that invites commuters to vent about the stupid driving habits they see while crawling along the Sunset Highway.

Those benefits pushed Intel to the No. 1 spot on the list of the best Fortune 500 companies for workers to commute to, according to a first-ever survey by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The survey, to be released today, places Nike 14th.



DANA ROMANOFF / THE OREGONIAN

Theo Spanos, a former systems analyst, takes MAX from his home in Southeast Portland to Intel every day. Getting out of driving allowed him to read about data modeling, which helped him land a different job at the company.



▲ As pictured on September 29, 2004, Business Section front page feature

The Fortune 500 ranks companies according to gross revenues: Intel placed 53rd while Nike, the only Oregon-based company among the 500, placed 184th this year.

The EPA created its list to draw attention to the benefits of reduced air pollution and traffic tie-ups that occur when companies persuade their employees to bike, bus, car-pool and telecommute to their jobs.

As congestion worsens in the nation's biggest cities, the EPA and other organizations express hope companies will use the list to lure workers who are tired of wasting time sitting in traffic alone.

"For most people, it takes them a while to get a grip on a new idea," said Mark Gorman, who is in charge of commute reduction for Intel's U.S. sites. "Then, three weeks later, there are these glowing stories about car pools and van pools, and people are kicking themselves that they didn't try it sooner."

A nationwide study released earlier this month ranked the Portland-Vancouver area 14th-worst in congestion behind

Los Angeles, Boston, Miami and New York. Travel delays cost drivers in the Portland region an average of 41 hours a year, according to the Texas Transportation Institute's annual report on road congestion around the nation.

EPA officials said 69 companies listed on the Fortune 500 qualified for the designation "best workplace for commuters." The businesses had to offer a certain number of benefits, such as transit subsidies, and on-site amenities, such as lockers and showers to encourage bikers and runners; explain those benefits to employees; and designate at least one employee to be in charge of reducing single-person car commutes.

Intel employs 81,700 people worldwide. About 15,000 work in the company's seven campuses in Washington County.

HUNDREDS CAR-POOL AT INTEL

According to Gorman, more than 900 employees on those campuses carpool. Intel subsidizes 400 to 420 Tri-Met passes a month and provides employees with laptops for the option of telecommuting, he said. The company's self-contained sites also cut down on errand-running: They include a cafeteria and a company store.

The company's evangelistic approach to commuting alternatives is infectious, employees say.

Evan Hansen says his carpool partner, Girish Ghimire, pushes him to get home by dinnertime instead of poring over reports late into the night. He and Ghimire, avid climbers, usually spend the 15-minute ride swapping tips about techniques and equipment. Earlier this year, Ghimire took Hansen and his wife along on a trip to his native Nepal.

Hansen, who hates commuting a minute more than he has to, said the carpool parking spaces near the front of Intel's Ronler Acres campus allow him and Ghimire to zip in and out of work in record time rather than sloshing through the rain from a distant space at the edge of the lot. And he likes having someone else do the driving.

"When I drive with Girish, I'm sitting in a warm seat, the car's warm, it's not my problem if we're on time -- it's his problem," Hansen said. "I'm not watching the clock; I'm

just waiting for Girish to show up."

SIMILAR BENEFITS AT NIKE

Nike offers its employees similar benefits, in addition to a dry cleaning drop-off service and the opportunity to buy movie tickets at work -- reducing the need to leave the company's Beaverton headquarters during the work day. Company officials also host random prize drawings for employees who commute to work in ways other than driving alone.

Nicole LaHaie, a regional account manager in Nike's soccer specialty division, gave up driving her gas-guzzling pickup when she realized she could save \$378 a year in gas by taking MAX from Hillsboro to Beaverton. She spends the 22 minutes each way reading detective novels and observing other light-rail riders.

"It's become such a habit to sit and be able to read that I don't like to drive now," she said. "Looking at how people do their lives -- who has coffee, who doesn't, who's eating their breakfast and who isn't -- people-watching is a big thing."

Gorman, of Intel, said the commuting benefits have been a potent recruiting tool for the company at least in the past three years. Human resource experts expect that trend to continue as companies realize they need to offer employees incentives to balance their work and home lives.

LESS-COSTLY PERK FOR COMPANY

Even as the economy started tanking in 2000, the number of companies offering commuting subsidies increased, said Jen Jorgensen, a spokeswoman for the Society for Human Resource Management in Alexandria, Va. In random surveys of 459 of its 190,000 members, the trade association found that 12 percent offered some version of a transit subsidy in 2004, up from 9 percent in 2000.

When times are tight, she said, companies tend to reduce more-expensive perks such as health insurance rather than less-costly commuting benefits, which can make or break a potential employee's decision to accept a job offer.

"There's a large difference if a person's commute is two hours of pure annoyance or an hour's worth of productivity if you can commute with a co-worker," Jorgensen said. "How many times do you stand around the water cooler and hear people complain about it?"

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1. Intel	Santa Clara, Calif. (general number of employees in Hillsboro)
2. Oracle	Redwood City, Calif.
3. Cisco Systems	San Jose, Calif.
4. JDA	San Antonio, Texas
5. Sun Microsystems	Santa Clara, Calif.
6. Oracle	Redwood City, Calif.
7. Advanced Micro Devices	Sunnyvale, Calif.
8. Texas Instruments	Dallas, Texas
9. Salesforce	Sunnyvale, Calif.
10. Dell	Round Rock, Texas
11. Hewlett-Packard	Palo Alto, Calif. (headquarters in Eugene)
12. Apple Computer	Cupertino, Calif.
13. Sun Microsystems	Sunnyvale, Calif.
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